

Academic Paper

'A new vision!': Exploring coachee experiences of using photography in coaching – An interpretative phenomenological analysis

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Abstract

Photography is an accessible, participatory tool used in various therapeutic and research contexts. However, little research has been done to explore uses of photography within coaching. This qualitative study explores the question, 'How does using photography affect coachees' experiences of engagement and accessibility in coaching?' through semi-structured interviews, analysed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology. Findings revealed that using photographs in coaching enriched the coaching experience, extending engagement and participation; cultivated mindful self-awareness and enhanced positivity. The results offer coaches, coach educators and researchers, important insights into using photography in coaching and the impact this has on coachee experience.

Keywords

photography, coaching, qualitative, coachee experience, participatory,

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Introduction

Increasing mastery as a coach demands ongoing development of coaching practices, deployed with versatility to secure successful outcomes for individual clients (Drake, 2009). Creative approaches are recognized as important in this endeavour due to their power in “unlocking a person’s potential, the trigger for ‘A-ha! moments’” (Van Nieuwerburgh, 2014, p.120). Van Nieuwerburgh highlights a wide range of creative techniques for use in coaching sessions, including using physical props, drawing, creative writing, clay modelling, drama and walking and argues strongly that the use of innovative and creative approaches is “an essential part of the coaching process” (p.145). However, research literature on using creative approaches in coaching and the impact these have on coachee experience is currently limited.

Coaching needs a firm research base for its continued development (Linley, 2006) and increased understanding of its impact on coachee experience (Stelter, 2014). This is particularly pertinent with regards to the impact of using creative approaches in coaching on coachee experience. Specifically, there is an absence of research into creative uses of photography in coaching, even though applications are recorded in other related domains, such as psychotherapy and psychological research. This study seeks to address this void by exploring uses of photography that may broaden the creative repertoire in coaching as well as offer alternative modes of coaching delivery to help widen participation and tackle issues of accessibility. The focus is on the subjective experience of three coachees, participating in a specially devised coaching intervention that integrates photographic experiences into a sequence of four coaching sessions. The coaching contexts spanned a mix of business, life and personal development.

Following an analysis of relevant literature associated with coaching, photography and the applied use of photography in other domains, details about how photography was integrated in coaching for this study will be given. After that, reasons for selecting interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the methodology most suited to this study will be outlined. Findings and an associated discussion will be organized around key themes emerging from participant experiences of using photography in the coaching process. To conclude, key recommendations for future research will be made.

Literature Review

This section reviews important background information necessary to understand the range and potential impact of different photographic experiences on the individual, alongside some examples of applications of photography in related therapeutic and research domains. Some important perspectives on creativity in coaching are explored, alongside consideration of a rationale for the use of visual approaches.

The complexity of the photographic experience

Understanding the unique qualities of a photograph and photographic experience is key to understanding their potential relevance and application in coaching. Photographic theorists, such as Barthes (1980), believe that a photograph is special because it captures a moment in time, providing visual evidence of the existence of a person, place or thing. He argued that, at a basic level, photographs can be classified by the affect they provoke: “punctum” (p.27) photographs have the power to arouse deep emotional feelings and “studium” (p.26) photographs evoke general interest. Barthes further distinguished three types of photographic experience: firstly, *taking photographs*, which is associated with imagination, creativity, sense of agency (Weiser, 1980); gaining new perspectives (Craig, 2009); and enhancing wellbeing (Simmons, 2013). Secondly, *viewing photographs*, which brings past moments to life in the present (Frith & Harcourt, 2007); activating a rich web of interconnected memories, thoughts and feelings in the viewer, depending on the subject and context (Weiser, 1980); evoking thoughts about what is absent (Berger, 2013); inviting questions, memories and flexible narratives (Weiser, 1980); and aiding exploration of personal narratives (Lemon, 2007). Thirdly, *being the object in a photograph (including self-portraits)*, which invites three different perspectives (that of photographer, subject and spectator) on identity to emerge, enabling deep inner dialogue, insight and creativity (Bond & Woodhall, 2005). Self-portraits, in particular, encourage an observer-view of the self, prompting imaginative vision (Nunez, 2013. P.104); reflection on life narratives, re-authoring narratives and self-wisdom (Ziller, 2000). Sontag (1990) asserted that any photograph has multiple meanings and therein lies its potential intrigue. Furthermore, the act of sharing and talking about photographs, particularly biographical ones, encourages dialogue and sense-making, thereby building relationships (Bermann, 1993). Indeed, photographs are said to act as a focus for communication, generating multiple narratives, enhancing insight into values, feelings and experiences (Craig, 2009) and

supporting self-reflection, meaning-making and self-understanding (Halkola, 2013). Interestingly, this understanding of how different types of photographic experience can impact on individuals has been applied in a number of related domains to augment or enrich practice. These will now be reviewed with their relevance to coaching in mind.

The use of photography in allied psychological fields

In the field of psychological research, qualitative researchers have recognised photography as an important tool for increasing understanding of psychological processes (Willig, 2013). For example, photography has been found to aid rapport-building and elicit more information than pure verbal interviews (Collier, 1957, p.856); elicit deep reflections, thoughts and feelings (Rose, 2007); “evoke deeper levels of consciousness than words alone” (Harper, 2002, p.13); enable a sense of agency (Del Busso, 2011) and inspire detailed and precise narratives (Radley & Taylor, 2003). Three main applications of photography are in evidence in this context: photo-elicitation, photo-production and photovoice (Willig, 2013). *Photo-elicitation* methods use pre-existing photographs, commonly applied when exploring change and transitions (Del Busso, 2011), visualizations of identity or supporting participants’ narratives (Silver & Reavey, 2010). *Photo-production* involves the creation of photographs during research to promote empowerment, cognitive engagement, sense of agency and to provide researchers with insights into participants’ inner and outer worlds (Frith & Harcourt, 2007; Del Busso, 2011). *Photo-voice* uses photographs to empower marginalized groups giving them voice, identity and recognition, with the aim of raising awareness or positive social action (Hodgetts, Radley, Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2007). The wealth of applied photography evident in psychological research is not the only domain actively utilising the visual power of photography to support practice. The closely related fields of psychotherapy and social work have also established applications to support their clients in various ways. For example, in the field of psychotherapy, a specialized practice called *phototherapy* has evolved. Weiser (1999), a leading proponent, asserts that photographs are embedded with implicit meaning and ‘have the power to capture and express feelings and ideas in visual-symbolic forms, some of which are intimately personal metaphors’ (p. 6). Phototherapy employs a range of photo-techniques to explore implicit meanings and their relationship with clients’ self-identity, relationships and perspectives (Weiser, 1999). Gibson (2018) outlines a related practice, called *therapeutic photography*, he uses in social work group contexts, highlighting how using photographs aids dialogue by externalising, objectifying and creating distance to explore issues and concerns from new perspectives. Even though the adaptation of other techniques from psychotherapy has previously led to innovations in coaching (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017), the application of photography in coaching has remained largely uncharted territory.

The evolution of coaching to meet 21st century needs

Whilst a wide range of approaches is characteristic of coaching psychology (Passmore, Peterson & Friere, 2012), coaching practices need to continually evolve to meet the expectations, opportunities and demands of the day (Stelter, 2014). Currently, coaching takes place in a variety of contexts, including organizations, personal, health-related and leadership (Kauffman & Bachkirova, 2009) and its purpose spans performance improvement, strengths-enhancement and meaning-based approaches (Stelter, 2014). However, the dominant style usually takes the form of one-to-one conversation sessions between coach and coachee (Flaherty, 2010; Ives, 2008; Ives & Cox, 2012). This reliance on an ability to verbalise thoughts, feelings and situations accurately can place heavy cognitive demands on the individuals engaged in coaching, which could potentially be supported by incorporating a more creative or visual approach (Gash, 2017). Gash asserts that by incorporating visual metaphors and elements in coaching, communication is made easier, self-awareness is expanded and deep exploration of implicit meanings is enabled (2017). Others too, have sought to augment reliance on verbal communication in coaching through more active approaches, for example, integrating walking (Turner, 2017) and art-based activities (Ramos-Volz, 2018). Recognising that the core conversational approach may limit the accessibility or potency of coaching for some individuals is an important step in the evolution of coaching in the 21st century.

Disabilities are not always visible and many may struggle with the direct verbal format because of language processing or fluency limitations, neurodiversity conditions, social anxiety or other socio-cultural barriers, yet research into the assistive role of creative and visual approaches in coaching is currently limited.

Dual-coding theory (Pavio & Csapo, 1969; 1973) suggests that combining information in visual and verbal formats serves to enhance learning and memory. Indeed, using visual methods to support verbal recall and communication is well established in other fields, such as qualitative psychology research (Willig, 2013) and education (Meier, 2000). More recently, Van Nieuwerburgh (2019) highlighted the potential of visual imagery and prompts used in coaching in creating powerful emotional connections and “a more relaxed mode from which insight and learning may emerge” (p. 62). The quality of the working alliance formed between the client and therapist has been identified as a crucial active ingredient in psychotherapeutic contexts (Asay & Lambert, 1999) and the relationship formed between the coach and coachee is also said to lie at the heart of successful coaching (Van Nieuwerburgh & Love, 2019). However, detailed empirical research exploring the impact of using visual techniques in coaching remains elusive. Furthermore, though photography has been applied creatively in other domains as a visual technique, for example, in sport education research (Cope, 2015) and health psychology research (Willig, 2013), it has not yet received any serious research attention in business or life-coaching contexts.

In sum, the combination of photography’s creative potential, wider developments in society regarding accessibility expectations and the potential of photo-imagery to enhance insight, learning and emotional connection make venturing into this research territory both timely and salient. This current study contributes to the knowledge of how using photography in coaching is experienced by coachees. It explores the key question: How does using photography affect coachees’ experience of engagement and accessibility in coaching? For the purposes of this study, ‘engagement’ means active involvement and commitment; ‘accessibility’ means the ability to participate, understand and benefit from; and ‘coaching’ is a one-to-one, in-person focused dialogue between a coach and coachee, using a narrative coaching framework (Drake, 2016).

Methodology

This study used the qualitative methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) to increase understanding of uses of photography in coaching from a coachee perspective. This exploratory, experiential approach was chosen due to the lack of previous research about the phenomena or its impact. This prompted the decision to explore the depth and richness of the experiences of a small number of individual coachees using photography within an authentic coaching context.

This research is rooted in an interpretivist/constructivist theoretical framework (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Based on Heidegger’s philosophical study of interpretative understanding, known as hermeneutics (Lavery, 2003), this framework considers that “reality is socially constructed” (Mertens, 2005, p.12) and dependent on an individual’s perspective on a given phenomenon and contextual factors (Willig, 2013). Research conducted from this standpoint recognizes, “that different perspectives generate different insights into the same phenomenon” (Willig, 2013, p.46).

IPA is a methodology that aims, “to explore a participant’s experience from his or her perspective” (Willig, 2013, p.87). It was developed specifically to enable deep, systematic exploration of individual subjective experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Its theoretical position is informed by phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, the detailed analysis of particular cases (Smith, et al, 2009). By adopting a careful, systematic interpretative process, IPA explores how individuals make sense of their experiences (Smith et al, 2009). It acknowledges the inevitability of the researcher’s own world view interacting with the participant’s experience and that the analysis of a

participant's experience will be an interpretation of the experience. The 'double hermeneutic' of the researcher attempting to make sense of the participant making sense of an experience, is recognized as central to the process (Smith et al, 2009). As a result, it requires a reflexive attitude on the part of the researcher in recognition of the potential for interpretive bias (Willig, 2013). Reflexivity was incorporated into all stages of the research. An IPA sample should be small, reasonably homogeneous and participants selected purposively in that they can offer a particular perspective on the phenomenon under study (Smith et al, 2009). The small sample size enables a great depth of analysis and a commitment to idiography (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011).

The study was approved by the University of East London, School of Psychology, Code of Practice for Research Ethics and the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct. Full and informed consent was secured, the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw without explanation up to a specific date was detailed. Risk awareness and management for all parties was inherent in the design of the study. Confidentiality was protected through data anonymization, storage security measures and clear protocols for retention and deletion.

A purposive sample of three adults (one female and two males) was recruited. All participants had some prior experience of being coached, lived in the London area, had scored above 40/55 on a coaching readiness assessment, made an informed time commitment to this research and were not currently experiencing/receiving medical treatment for any mental health conditions. Pseudonyms have been created to preserve the anonymity of each participant. Each identified a genuine purpose for coaching support, summarized as follows: for Annie, a first-time mother, it was becoming more organized; for Tim, a middle manager, it was adjusting to a new management role and for Peter, a creative professional, it was progressing a personal creative project.

The Coaching Intervention

An innovative coaching intervention was designed by the researcher to blend photographic experience with coaching, specifically for the purposes of this study. The intervention consisted of four coaching sessions, held 1 to 2 weeks apart. Participants completed a different photo-assignment prior to each session and this formed a key focus for the session. The order of sessions in the intervention followed the four stages of Drake's (2016) narrative coaching sequence: situate, search, shift and sustain. The range of photographic experiences included collecting, viewing, taking and self-portraiture photography (Barthes, 1980; Weiser, 1980) and were selected with clear relevance to the coaching intention and linked to the participants' coaching issues.

For photo-assignment 1 (Lifespan), participants collected 5-10 significant photographs spanning their life story to date. Within the coaching session, the participant was invited to share their photographs, explaining why they were chosen. The coach role was to work with coachee narratives to situate the coachee and the coaching issue in time/place and cultivate dialogue around the notion of a changing self. For photo-assignment 2 (What matters), participants created 5-10 photographs representing what really matters in their life now. Within the coaching session, the participant was invited to share their photographs, explaining their meaning and significance. The coach role was to work with coachee narratives to cultivate searching dialogue around meaning and values related to the coaching issue. For photo-assignment 3 (Future self), participants created two self-portrait photographs, one representing the self in their current situation and the other representing the self in their desired future situation. Within the coaching session, the participant was invited to share the photographs, explaining their meaning and identifying key issues contributing to the differences between them. The coach role was to listen to coachee narratives, cultivate dialogue around the shift needed to close the gap, generating three valued actions. For photo-assignment 4 (Key actions), participants took three photographs to represent the three key gap-closing actions they wanted to take. Within the coaching session, the participant

used these photographs to create a detailed visual action plan. The coach role was to facilitate dialogue, reflection and to co-create a visual plan for sustainable valued action.

Potential participants were informed by email of the research study by an advert outlining its aims, time commitment, participation in the coaching intervention and what the interview entailed, the voluntary nature of participation and how anonymity would be preserved. Expressions of interest by email were sent a more formal participant invitation letter, with details of how to confirm consent to participate. On confirmation, a pre-intervention questionnaire was sent to gather basic information related to the criteria outlined above. Finally, a group of three participants were selected for the coaching intervention and post-intervention interview and signed consent was obtained. Then, four 1-hour coaching sessions were negotiated with each participant with details of the photo-assignments given to enable time for completion.

A five-minute interview before each coaching session was used to audio-record participant feedback about the experience of *doing* the photo-assignment and after the session, a 15-minute interview was used to audio-record participant feedback about the experience of *using* the photographs in the session. After completion of all four sessions, a 45-60 minute semi-structured audio-recorded interview took place. Finally, in a debrief session, the participant was given the opportunity to ask questions, was thanked and given a debrief letter. Immediately after each set of interviews, an entry was made by the researcher into a reflexive journal recording thoughts, feelings and reactions. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher shortly after each session.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

Data was collected at nine separate data points throughout the coaching intervention period for each coachee, creating a total of twenty-seven data points for analysis.

Data elicitation was designed around the coaching intervention consisting of short semi-structured interviews before (5 minutes) and after (15 minutes) each of the four coaching sessions, followed by a 45-60 minute semi-structured interview at the end of the whole intervention with each of the participants. An outline plan for each coaching session and the indicative questions related to each photo-assignment was devised, informed by the existing literature and the researcher's previous coaching experience (see appendix 1).

Audio recordings were made of the first 5 and last 15 minutes of each coaching session and the 45-60 minute semi-structured interviews with each participant. These were transcribed and used for analysis.

Data Analysis

The resultant transcribed texts generated by each participant were analysed individually, in line with the idiographic approach taken in IPA. For each case, the following analysis process (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) was used:

- Stage 1: To start, each transcript was read and re-read followed by engagement in descriptive, linguistic and conceptual exploratory level coding.
- Stage 2: Following this, a more systematic reading identified emergent themes in the texts.
- Stage 3: The relationships between emergent themes was identified and organized into clusters.

- Stage 4: A summary table detailing clusters, themes, prevalence, key words and locations of associated quotations was compiled for each individual participant.
- Stage 5: Finally, a set of master themes was integrated across transcripts in order to identify group-level shared themes that reflected the experience of using photography in coaching for the group as a whole.

Yardley's (2000; 2017) four broad principles for quality in qualitative research were used as a guiding framework at all stages of the design and conduct of this study.

Results

Three main themes and nine sub-themes emerged from the analysis and are displayed in Table 1 with prevalence information. Further prevalence information, in relation to each photo-assignment, is shown in Table 2. Each theme and sub-theme will be presented in turn, illustrated by the use of participants' quotations and researcher's interpretative commentary.

Table 1: Main themes, sub-themes and participant prevalence

Main themes	Sub-themes	Participant Prevalence
1. Photographs enrich the coaching experience	1.1 Engagement in the coaching process	3
	1.2 Activating participation in coaching	3
	1.3 Springboard for valued action	3
2. Photographs cultivate mindful self-awareness	2.1 Awareness of changing versions of self	3
	2.2 Awareness of what really matters	3
	2.3 Awareness of desired future version of self	3
3. Photographs activate positive thoughts and feelings	3.1 Memories of positive life experiences	3
	3.2 Enjoyment of creative challenge	3
	3.3 Pleasure in talking about photographs	3

Table 2: Main themes, sub-themes and participant prevalence by photographic assignment

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Photo-assignment			
		1: Life-span	2: What matters	3: Future self	4: Key actions
1. Photographs enrich the coaching experience	1.1 Engagement in the coaching process	3	3	3	3
	1.2 Activating participation in coaching	3	3	3	3
	1.3 Springboard for valued action	3	3	3	3
2. Photographs cultivate mindful self-awareness	2.1 Awareness of changing versions of self	3	3	3	3
	2.2 Awareness of what really matters	3	3	3	3
	2.3 Awareness of desired future version of self	0	3	3	3
3. Photographs activate positive thoughts and feelings	3.1 Memories of positive life experiences	3	3	3	0
	3.2 Enjoyment of creative challenge	3	3	3	1
	3.3 Pleasure in talking about photographs	3	3	3	3

1. Photographs Enrich the Coaching Experience

The photography tasks that participants completed prior to each coaching session influenced the experience of coaching, empowering the participants in a number of significant ways.

1.1 Engagement in the coaching process

All the participants described high levels of sustained cognitive engagement when completing the photography tasks between the coaching sessions. This had the effect of extending engagement in the coaching process beyond the actual sessions. Tim acknowledged this additional layer of impact by reflecting on the session pre-requirements:

...it requires you do some preparation....other kinds of coachingjust turn up not having thought about anything....don't really benefit from it....but having had to think about things beforehand, you can see there is more benefit....you get more out of it. (Tim)

Annie also explained:

I found it challenging because there were too many pictures I wanted to choose, so I really had to make choices. So that's difficult....I tried to choose the most interesting pictures so I can find things to say about them. (Annie)

This text seems to demonstrate that Annie was evaluating photographs before the session. The photo-assignments sustained participant attention over time because of the combination of reflection, evaluation and creativity needed. When Peter asked, "...what are my most important values? Why? How am I going to articulate those using photographs?", he showed he was grappling creatively with the assignment in advance of the session. Participants all described how engagement in the photo-assignments served to extend their active attention beyond the coaching session, leading to a strong sense of readiness for the session.

1.2 Activating participation in coaching

Photographs activated participation in different ways. For example, when Tim noted that, "...the photos served as a springboard", he was describing how they helped him to articulate his thoughts in sessions. Peter identified how using photographs facilitated and supported his sense of agency and involvement in sessions:

....doing my own research into myself, in the way I want to talk about myself rather than be asked a load of questions, which might not actually get to that. So, I am able to control that and reveal detail that might be missed, giving a more focused and much more personal discussion about what I want to talk about...what I think is important.... They actually enabled me to describe more effectively what was important. (Peter)

For Annie, photographs provided tangible support,

It helped me to talk because I had some support.... Yeah, I felt very free....talking helps me remember things as well. I am able to remember more things ...decide more effectively. (Annie)

This highlighted her perception that photographs enabled and supported her active participation in the coaching process. In sum, for these participants, the photo-assignments activated their participation by providing a springboard for dialogue, support for talking and thinking and by increasing coachee agency in the content and direction of coaching.

1.3 A springboard for valued action

All the participants expressed how the photographic assignments served to clarify their current situation and imbued their coaching goal with deeper meaning and purpose. When Annie explained,

...now I really want to reach that goal even more because I've looked at the pictures. I don't know why....maybe because they gave me good feelings...because I want to be a good mum...

*when I see myself in the picture, I think....yeah, I am a mum now, so I need to behave as that.
(Annie)*

She was motivated by what made her life meaningful. For some participants, their photographs acted as visual motivators, galvanizing them into action. Peter described how key photo-assignments resulted in him thinking, "Get a move on! Do something! If this is what you want to be or where you want to end up...get on with it!" Clearly, he had been motivated to act. In other instances, participants felt that the use of photographs in coaching served a motivating sense of connection between their values, goals and actions. Tim found his experience of using photographs in coaching resulted in greater clarity of his values, motivating him to act. He explained:

It's giving clarity....a sort of fleshed out motivation....I think I want this. Why though? Because of these things. Ok. Why those things? Because they're the irreducible values that I would like to govern my life. (Tim)

These examples highlight how the photo-assignments in coaching prompted self-reflection and dialogue in sessions, resulting in increased motivation to take valued action, improved clarity of purpose linked to what makes life meaningful.

2. Photographs Cultivate Mindful Self-awareness

Creating, viewing and discussing significant photographs resulted in opportunities to reflect on various aspects of identity: past, present and future.

2.1 Awareness of changing versions of self

Looking at lifespan photographs generated a clear awareness of changing versions of self over time for all participants. More recent photographs sometimes prompted an unanticipated, more striking realisation of a changing self. Annie experienced this when sharing a photograph showing her with her baby:

Because my baby is in my pictures...to see myself like a mum because...it's a very big change... you have to get used to it. So seeing pictures of yourself like....in action...it's not just like a selfie....it's like in the real life. So yeah, you're not used to it. (Annie)

This demonstrates her sudden recognition of her new identity as a mother. Participants described a process of sense-making when viewing and discussing photographs of themselves over time. Peter observed, "You might be a number of different people throughout your life and that's evident when you look at photographs", demonstrating his awareness of a changing self. Viewing photographs prompted reflection on changing identities, which Tim grappled to explain,

*It sort of is both setting up a continuum but it's also fragmenting it, so you kind of think of the ways in which you change or develop over time, so you think...that is both me and it isn't me.
(Tim)*

This described the puzzling complexity he experienced in reconciling the younger versions of self with current versions. Participant experiences highlighted how photographs enable an observer-view of the self, increasing awareness of changing versions of self over time.

2.2 Awareness of what really matters now

All participants agreed that creating photographs depicting what matters most in life, prompted sustained reflection and evaluation of the relative importance of aspects of their current lives. Annie noted, "...it makes you realise what's important... because you have to take a picture of it, so it's much clearer in your head". In general, this led to greater clarity and conscious awareness, as the

act of creating or selecting a limited number of photographs meant decisions had to be made. Alongside the experience of clarity, participants also described a sense of satisfaction in making visible, aspects of themselves that on one level they already knew but had never actually been given voice. This was experienced as self-validating by Peter,

...confirming aspects of me, myself, my personality, my existence. Confirming what I thought of myself....what is important in my life...and what I am trying to do ... it helped me to realise what I was grateful for in life. (Peter)

The increased awareness of what really mattered discussed in coaching using photographs as prompts, resulted in deeper reflections on current challenges being faced, opening possibilities for new perspectives. Tim highlighted this saying,

...it was clarifying...who you are, what your values are and how they are going to intersect with the challenge that you've come to talk about....it really does open you up. (Tim)

These examples show photographs used in coaching prompted deep reflection and increased awareness of what matters most in life for each participant.

2.3 Awareness of desired future version of self

All participants agreed that photo-assignment 3 (self-portraits) was challenging, requiring considerable self-reflection and heightened awareness of both their present and desired future situation. Annie explained her experience,

I've been paying more attention on what I am doing...everyday...like I've been thinking about what I would put in my picture...paying more attention to all the things I do that I am not happy with and things I want to change or improve. (Annie)

Making decisions about what would be in the photographs was experienced as a creative activity, with participants using theatrical and story-based terms such as staging, characters and props to describe their experiences. This sense of being an actor encouraged participants to take an observer perspective on the current and desired future version of self in each photograph. Peter explained this observer stance, "You're trying to put yourself into that position...of that character and what they would feel like and what they would look like and what they would do". Creating a photograph to make visible and give voice to the desired future version of self served to increase awareness in all participants. This sense of heightened awareness and sharper clarity of purpose, motivated participants to immediate action. Tim noted that while doing photo-assignment 3 (self-portraits) led to insight regarding the challenges he faced as well as his subsequent actions,

...[it gave] clarity of the causes, factors leading to the overall problem....being more conscious of them, more conscious of how to manage them, leading to benefits and changing the way I do certain things...that was good. (Tim)

Photo-assignment 3 (self-portraits) generated considerable self-reflection followed by increased clarity and awareness of the desired future self for all participants, increasing motivating to take action.

3. Photographs activate positive thoughts and feelings

The analysis identified that using photography in coaching generated multiple opportunities for participants to experience positive thoughts and feelings.

3.1 Memories of positive life experiences

All participants described how photo-assignment 1, viewing and selecting significant photographs taken over their lifespan, acted as powerful activators of positive memories of people, places and experiences. Annie reflected, "I really enjoyed the task because it reminded me a lot of memories, nice memories." The experience of having to select a finite number of significant photographs necessitated looking through many more and making choices, which added to the challenge and interest of the task. Peter explained:

I found finding the pictures interesting and also a sort of nice feeling because I looked at them and I got recollections of times gone by that were enjoyable. Because most of the pictures were happy times....things we were doing that were fun or people that are special to me. (Peter)

Participants reflected that viewing and selecting the significant photographs had evoked a wide range of positive emotions, among them, gratitude, love, curiosity, pride, interest and amusement. Tim indicated how his choices were influenced by the feelings they generated:

I felt amusement at some of them. Some of the pictures I picked were quite fun, so I like them, I find them funny, of me as a little kid. So, happiness, I guess looking at that. (Tim)

By selecting and viewing these particular photographs from his lifespan, Tim felt a surge of positive emotion, showing the power of the photograph in activating the positive emotional response.

3.2 Enjoyment of creative challenge

The photo-assignments were experienced as a creative challenge to convey meaning through visual metaphors, giving rise to feelings of enjoyment and satisfaction. Tim explained this:

Yeah, I did like it. It was satisfying to look at the brief and think, 'right, how am I going to express this?....it was kind of a creative thing to think, how can I compress all my thoughts and feelings into this one photo, that can just stand for all those things? (Tim)

His comments typified how participants viewed this creative challenge and sustained cognitive engagement as a source of positivity. One anomalous finding related to photo-assignment 4 (Key actions), where both Annie and Tim perceived the task as more functional and the creative element of doing it less demanding. This reduced their enjoyment related to creative expression but did not affect their enjoyment of talking about their photographs within the coaching session. Conversely, Peter enjoyed the task and perceived it as a creative opportunity to including visual metaphors connected with each key action.

3.3 Pleasure in talking about photographs

Sharing and talking about their photographs in the coaching sessions was another source of positivity for the participants. Annie noted:

It's nice to talk to someone who doesn't know anything about those pictures or this part of my life. It's a new view, a new vision. It's refreshing, I think. That made me happy. (Annie)

And Peter explained, "It felt very good actually....it made me feel special because I am the centre of things, talking about me, my life and things that are important to me." Both were articulating a sense of agency and feelings of enjoyment in talking about their photographs in the session.

The positive thoughts and feelings experienced by participants were evoked by the creative challenge and positive memories offered by the photo-assignments, together with their use as catalyst for dialogue.

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, from the perspective of coachee experience, how using photography affected coachees' experience of engagement and accessibility in coaching. The findings indicated a number of positive outcomes associated with an enriched coaching experience. Firstly, photo-assignments resulted in participants experiencing high levels of cognitive engagement between coaching sessions. Experiencing engagement is an important dimension of wellbeing (Seligman, 2011) and cognitive engagement is strongly associated with effective learning (Griffiths & Burns, 2012) – both desirable outcomes for coaching. Secondly, participants reported becoming more mindfully aware of daily actions and circumstances related to the coaching issue identified, resulting in reflective and solution-focused thinking. This is an important finding for coaching because the photo-assignments extended participant involvement in the coaching process in a way that was experienced as enjoyable, creative and challenging. A further review of literature revealed that coachee involvement beyond the coaching session can be one of the key active ingredients in securing effective coaching outcomes (Smith & Brummel, 2013).

The findings indicated that participants found the experience of using photographs activated participation within coaching sessions and supported talking, in detail, about matters of interest to them. They experienced a strong sense of agency within the dialogue through deciding what photographs to collect, create and share. This echoes findings about using photographs from psychological research regarding increased sense of agency (Del-Busso, 2011; Frith & Harcourt, 2007) and support for participant narratives (Silver & Reavey, 2010). Albeit on an individual level, the findings also resonate with those associated with Photovoice, where using their photographs empowers voice, identity and recognition, toward positive action (Hodgett, Radley, Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2007). This is an important finding as it shows that using photography in coaching may be a potent technique to support accessibility and engagement for the wide range of clients who have difficulty with its traditionally purely verbal format.

The study discovered that participants found using photographs in coaching was a springboard for taking valued action towards a meaningful future. Participants found using photographs to create a visual action plan was clarifying and motivating, serving to highlight the connections between planned actions and what makes life meaningful. The use of individual development plans in coaching has been found to be another key active ingredient in coaching success (Smith & Brummel, 2013). Adding a visual, photographic dimension to the development of the individual action planning process provided important additional focus and support.

Accessibility in coaching also entails using engaging techniques to support coachees in the exploration of the deeper personal concepts. The shift toward collaborative meaning-based coaching models, focusing on identity and values in relation to desired change (Stelter, 2014) make this important. Findings from this study showed that the 'observer' view offered by viewing photographs resulted in participants experiencing an increased awareness of self. Viewing changes to the self since childhood prompted participant reflection on the flexibilities and constants of personal identity. This aligns with previous studies suggesting that viewing the self as an observer in photographs, offers rich opportunities for exploration, reflection and discussion about identities (Gibson, 2018). This is an important finding in relation to coaching, as it suggests that photography may be a promising new technique to support coachees' exploration of identity.

The findings also suggest that photographs may be a useful technique to support coachees' discovery of personal values and sources of meaning in life. All participants experienced an increased awareness of what really mattered to them as a consequence of the related photo-assignment. The personal reflection and engagement needed to create this set of photographs was experienced as both satisfying and clarifying. This accords with previous findings that taking photographs have the power to enhance insight (Craig, 2009), self-understanding and clarity

(Halkola, 2013). Clarifying and becoming aware of what really matters, connects an individual to their personal values, what makes life meaningful, which builds motivation for meaningful action (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012) and makes a significant contribution to overall wellbeing (Seligman, 2011). This suggests the use of photography as an innovative technique that may make values and meaning more accessible constructs for coachees.

Participants experienced heightened mindful awareness of their daily actions and behaviour in relation to the issue identified for coaching, as a result of thinking about what photographs to take. This aligns with previous literature about taking photographs, noting that this conscious awareness of the present moment can promote inner dialogue, insight (Bond & Woodhall, 2005) and flexibility (Hayes et al., 2012), enabling imaginative vision about ways of being in the world (Nunez, 2013). These findings are important for coaching because they suggest that photo-assignments may support coachees' conscious awareness of desired changes they want to make in an accessible and engaging way.

The finding that using photographs in coaching can cultivate mindful awareness of the changing self are important because having a belief in one's ability to change and develop is another key active ingredient in coaching (Smith & Brummel, 2013). Being able to connect with personal values and what makes life meaningful is powerful source of motivation in committing to purposeful action (Hayes et al, 2012).

All participants reported on the positive thoughts and feelings that were experienced when viewing, taking and talking about their photographs throughout the coaching intervention. This aligns with findings from other disciplines (Simmons, 2013; Bond & Woodhall, 2005; Weiser, 1990). Positive emotions can broaden a person's capacity to think, be creative, see the big picture and take proactive action (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018). Experiences of taking photographs were reported as creative, challenging and enjoyable. This aligns with previous findings about the enjoyment, creativity and challenge inherent in taking photographs (Simmons, 2013; Craig, 2009; Nunez, 2013; Ziller, 2000 and Bond & Woodhall, 2005). Creative endeavour is said to enable an individual to experiment with situations and take different perspectives (Henley, 2018), as well as experience a sense of agency and control (Weiser, 1999). Reflection on participants' anomalous perception of creative opportunity in photo-assignment 4 (Key actions) highlighted the importance of the perception of creative challenge to the enjoyment of assignments. This suggests that additional elements of challenge may need to be added to personalize photo-assignments for some individuals, together with proactive encouragement for taking a creative approach to each photograph. Talking to the coach about their photographs was experienced as an enjoyable and affirming experience by all participants. This aligns with findings suggesting photographs as a rich focus to encourage dialogue and build positive relations (Berman, 1993). Therefore, using photography in coaching may be an important way of cultivating positivity, openness and creativity.

This study has revealed important, in-depth information about coachee experiences of using photography in coaching. Findings showed that using photography increased coachee engagement in the coaching process and enhanced the accessibility of the coaching experience in a number of interesting ways. Using photographs enriched the overall coaching experience, by extending active engagement beyond the coaching session, prompting mindful self-awareness and generating positive thoughts and feelings in participants. These promising findings will be of interest to coaches, coach educators and researchers, as they suggest that using photography, though previously overlooked in coaching, has considerable potential as an innovative creative technique to enhance the reach and effectiveness of coaching.

Considerations

A number of considerations should be borne in mind when interpreting these findings. Firstly, though the four photographic experiences devised for use in this study have provided some insight

into the impact that photography can have on coachee experience, other photographic experiences may elicit different responses.

A second consideration is that the coaching sessions were conducted by one coach only, whose style may have been an active ingredient in the findings. As an exploratory study, the 'one coach' design enabled a high degree of internal consistency for the intervention, allowing experiences of using photography to be the main focus.

Thirdly, consideration of the dual coach/researcher role in the design must be noted. Though great emphasis was given to the separate nature of the two roles prior to conducting interviews, it is possible that this duality of relationship may have influenced participants' responses or the researcher's interpretations. However, this risk was minimized using a reflexive approach, multiple data collection points, over the course of the intervention, distinct from the coaching sessions and adhering to systematic IPA procedures, rooting findings in the data.

Conclusion

Photographs have a number of unique qualities that make them a potentially powerful tool for use in coaching. They allow us to capture a moment in time and preserve it. They can transport us to different times and places from the past or prompt us to re-live those moments from the different vantage point of the present. They allow us to look at ourselves as a spectator looks and perhaps notice ourselves in new ways. They can help us to tell our story. They allow us to be playful and become actors in new stories of our own creation. Some or all of these qualities are known and have been applied by other professionals working in psychotherapy, social work and qualitative research but their use in coaching is under-researched. To address this gap, this innovative study has gathered in-depth information about the experiences of coachees when photography is used in coaching. This first-hand information showed that using photography increased coachee engagement in the coaching process and enhanced the accessibility of the coaching experience in a number of interesting ways. Using photographs enriched the overall coaching experience, by extending active engagement beyond the coaching session, prompting mindful self-awareness and generating positive thoughts and feelings in coachees.

By revealing new and exciting information about how using photography is experienced by coachees, this unique study has signposted the important potential that photography may have in increasing engagement and broadening accessibility more widely in coaching. For coach practitioners, these findings suggest a range of tangible ways that photo-experiences might be incorporated to explore implicit meanings captured in personal photographs and to enhance the working alliance through enriched dialogue. For coach educators, the findings may prompt the inclusion of photo-experiences in coach training to broaden the creative coaching skills repertoire and to explore how personally meaningful photographs can make coaching dialogue more accessible for coachees. It may also offer an engaging visual medium to deepen the trainee coach's own reflective practice. For example, innovative applications of photography are used in counsellor education, "to enhance the development of self, professional identity and multicultural awareness in trainee counsellors" (Schmidt, Murdock Bishop & Becker, 2018, p.1) and within medical education, "to enhance reflective practice and professional development with GP trainees" (Rutherford, Forde, Priego-Hernandez, Butcher & Wedderburn, 2018, p.1). This serves as recognition of the growing potential of using photography in professional settings and further emphasizes the importance of this study for coaching and coach education.

Finally, for researchers, a number of interesting research avenues are available, including utilizing a diversity of methodological approaches, populations and photo-assignments. In sum, a more complete research base will serve to further advance the understanding of coachee experiences

and expand the practice development of creative and innovative uses of photography in the coaching setting.

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Appendix 1: Interview Schedules (Indicative)

Before each coaching session

How would you describe your experience of doing the pre-session photo-assignment?

After each coaching session

What was your experience of using your photographs in the coaching session today?

At the end of the 4-session coaching intervention

1. What is your background and/or experience with photography?
2. In general, how did you find doing the between-session collecting and/or taking photography tasks?
 - Practicalities?
 - Thoughts?
 - Emotions?
 - Behaviours?
3. In general, how did you find talking about your photographs in the coaching sessions
4. What was your experience of collecting and talking about biographical photos taken over your lifespan?
5. How would you describe your experience of collecting and talking about your 'significant people/ places/things' photos?
6. What, if anything, was significant in your experience of taking and talking about your 'now and future' self-portraits?
7. How did it feel taking and talking about your 'key actions' photographs?
8. Overall, how would you describe your experience of using photography in coaching?
9. Is there anything else you would like to say?